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ABSTRACT

Information on undertaking an external degree program to obtain a college education is presented. An external degree program is one that has no, or minimal requirements for residence (on-campus attendance). Most often it can be entered at any time of the year and usually grants credit for documented learning already acquired. An external degree program does not preclude attending some classes on campus. The following topics are addressed: the value of an undergraduate, professional, or graduate degree; earning a college degree at home and on the job; the quality of external degrees; transfer of external degree credits; the importance of accreditation; types of institutions that offer external degrees; types of external degree programs; fields of study available in external degree programs; the geographics of external degrees; levels of external degree programs and options; considerations for choosing a field of study; the residency question; the much lower cost of external degrees; some reasons for choosing or not choosing an external degree program; the appropriateness of external degrees for adults 25 years old and over and for younger people; some degree opportunities available through external programs; and program details for Thomas A. Edison State College. (SW)

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YOUR COLLEGE DEGREE:

In Your Home • At Your Job • At Far Less Cost • In Much Less Time • At Your Pace • Starting At Any Time of Year • In Many Fields of Study • From An Accredited U.S. College or University • At Undergraduate and Graduate Levels

THE EXTERNAL DEGREE WAY

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YOUR COLLEGE DEGREE: THE EXTERNAL DEGREE WAY

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THE VALUE OF AN UNDERGRADUATE, PROFESSIONAL, OR GRADUATE DEGREE TO YOU

Simply put, a college or university degree at the appropriate level means higher earnings for the average person. The level may be undergraduate (associate or bachelor's), professional, or graduate (master's or doctorate). Certain people have said that a college degree has become less important today because some of the earnings gap has closed between those who have degrees and those who do not. Many experts feel, however, that academic credentials are even more important during periods of intense competition for the best jobs. We believe that the latter are correct. In a recent report, the U.S. Department of Labor stated that 40% of our labor force, age 25 and over, have at least one year of college; 22% are four-year college graduates. A large number of people also have professional and graduate degrees. We believe that you, with a college degree at an appropriate level, can be much more valuable--to your employer, to your family, to yourself--than you can be without that degree. Most importantly, the self-satisfaction and confidence you may gain from having that first college degree, or a higher-level degree, can be even more meaningful than the extra money it may bring you.

YOUR COLLEGE DEGREE, EARNED AT HOME AND ON THE JOB

You can earn a degree from an accredited college or university without leaving your home or your job. Or you can take a job anywhere in the world and still get your degree.

This degree will certainly cost far less and take much less of your time than would the same degree earned from the same institution, on campus.

Today, many colleges and universities offer two routes to undergraduate, professional, and graduate degrees--the traditional way, requiring attendance of on-campus classes, and the external degree way, offering credit for both past learning and learning you can gain from a variety of non-campus means.

WHAT IS AN EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAM?

An external degree program is one that has no, or minimal, requirements for residence (on-campus attendance). Most often it can be entered at any time of the year. It usually grants credit for documented learning you have already acquired, or can acquire off campus if this learning is equivalent to the learning you might have gotten from college-level courses had you taken such courses in the traditional way, on campus. Sources of credit in external programs are various, only some of which are: 1) Previous college work, even if it comprises miscellaneous courses rather than an integrated program. Such work is usually accepted at full value regardless of how long ago it was taken. 2) Current college work, taken at a local college, to be transferred to the external degree program. 3) Correspondence courses, from accredited colleges or universities. You may have taken such courses already, or you can easily take them at home, selecting your courses from over 12,000 offerings of around 70 institutions. 4) Proficiency examinations, such as CLEP, ACT PEP, AP, CPE, REDE, GRE, TECEP, which you have already completed or can pass, sometimes with minimal preparation. 5) Military service, for courses, examinations, and on-the-job experience you may have had, or are now getting, in the military. 6) Noncollegiate courses you may have taken, or can take, offered by businesses, industries, government agencies, labor unions, police academies, and other organizations. 7) Experiential learning (experience credit), for appropriate job, volunteer work, travel, reading,

creative, or many other kinds of experiences. 8) Cooperative education, apprenticeships, and internships, for the work/learning experience that the degree-granting institution may arrange specifically with your current employer, or with another employer. 9) Possession of professional licenses (such as LPN, RN, CPA, CLU, FAA) that may be evaluated to be the equivalent of college courses.

In many cases you have already acquired the knowledge, and you need only to take the correspondence courses, proficiency examinations, or experiential learning assessment to gain the credits, often with little or no further study. The significant amount of credits that are frequently awarded for the sources listed above, and others, usually means you can attain your college degree externally in much less time than it would take you to get that same degree on campus. You can be a full- or part-time worker in your home or at a job, far from a campus, and yet pursue college studies. In short, you can earn a living while you earn your college degree.

An external degree program does not preclude you from on-campus experiences, if that is your wish. If you prefer to attend some college classes, and you have a campus nearby, most often you will be able to integrate the courses you may take at your local accredited college into the external degree program of the distant campus.

THE QUALITY OF EXTERNAL DEGREES

Are external degrees "good"?

This question sometimes was asked in the early years of external degree programs when few people had heard of them. But now the existence and quality of external degrees are much better known.

External degrees have been around for a long time, but they have served large numbers of people only in the past several years. In the 1960's and 70's many of our long-established institutions of higher education came to realize they were not serving the needs of the full spectrum of our population--adults who could not give up homes and jobs to complete their degrees; handicapped persons who could not get to a campus; people who were confined to institutions; persons who lived great distances from a college or university; young people who, for financial or other reasons, could not "go away" to college. The list of people that were ill-served by traditional means is long.

Realizing the problem, many institutions began adopting a variety of nontraditional means to correct this deficiency, among them, external degree programs. Some of these programs were not well-conceived or supported, and they were soon terminated. Many others, though, survived the trial period and grew stronger. The early graduates of some of these programs have reported that whereas initially employers and others were sometimes skeptical of this new means of achieving a degree, that skepticism disappeared as the graduates' abilities were discovered to be of high level. Many graduates today say that employers highly regard these degrees among their employees. Employers have found that an individual who gets one of these degrees has qualities they value: determination, initiative, and ability to plan and complete an extended project independently with minimal guidance. Certainly, many graduates have testified that their external degree credentials have helped them to promotions, and to greater job and personal satisfaction. Many graduates have also used their external degree credentials to qualify for study at higher degree levels.

TRANSFER OF EXTERNAL DEGREE CREDITS

Are external degree credits transferable?

Many people do not realize that credits earned at even the most renowned colleges and universities in their classrooms may not be accepted by another college or university. The acceptance or rejection of credit by an institution is entirely an institutional prerogative. Some institutions whose tendencies are quite traditional might not, for example, accept experiential credit that has been awarded by another institution. On the other hand, such institutions also might not accept courses taught by another institution in a traditional manner, even though the courses would seem to be fully appropriate. Thus, gaining credits or a degree, even from an accredited institution (the only kind we recommend), is no guarantee that these credits or this degree will be accepted toward a degree by some other institution. However, since your external degree credits will come from an accredited institution, the chances are good that many or all of them will be accepted if, like any college credits from any source, they meet the program requirements of the institution which is considering them for transfer.

Most people use external degree programs to complete degrees they have begun at traditional institutions. Some people, however, use external degree programs to start their progress toward a degree, then later transfer the credits to a traditional program to complete the degree. If you have any doubts about transferability of credits, and you intend to use one set of credits or a degree as a prerequisite for another degree at a particular institution (regardless of whether your credits are earned through on-campus or external means) you should check with that institution to determine if its prerequisites are being met.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCREDITATION

We believe that accreditation is a most serious concern for a person seeking any degree, especially an external degree. We have seen numerous impressive brochures and catalogs from "colleges" and "universities" that offer "external degrees" at all levels--associate, bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and even professional degrees in law and medicine. A "degree" in virtually any field of study is possible through these entrepreneurial establishments. We got their materials just as would you, by responding to advertisements. A favorite ploy for bogus establishments is to claim to be "authorized," or "licensed," or "accredited." Several terms may be used to convey the notion of respectability. And indeed, these operations often are officially recognized. The problem for the unwary person is that such recognition may amount only to that which comes from paying a fee, such as for a permit to conduct business. Worse, an institution may be "accredited" by an "accrediting authority" that it has created just for this purpose.

What are sources of legitimate accreditation? We believe that most educators depend on one or both of two ultimate sources: the United States Department of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation. These two sources do not directly accredit institutions; rather, agencies within them are held responsible to evaluate various accrediting authorities. Those authorities in turn accredit individual institutions, elements of institutions, and individual programs. The list of accrediting authorities, the accredited institutions, and their accredited programs can be found in annual directories: Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs, by the U.S. Department of Education, and Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education, published by the American Council on Education for the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation.

There are two types of accreditation: institutional and specialized. The government's directory states: "Institutional accreditation normally applies to an entire institution, indicating that each of its parts is contributing to the achievement of an institution's objectives, although not necessarily all on the same level of quality. . . . Specialized accreditation normally applies to evaluation of programs, departments or schools which usually are parts of a total collegiate or other postsecondary institution. The unit accredited may be as large as a college or school within a university or as small as a curriculum within a discipline." Of all the programs offered by accredited institutions, only a small percentage usually will be subject to specialized accreditation. The directory published by the American Council on Education states: "The listings do not indicate all curricula offered by an institution. For example, curricula in anthropology, English, physics, and many other disciplines are not listed because no recognized specialized accreditation exists in those fields." Like some of the on-campus degrees, a few external degrees may receive specialized accreditation.

In most cases, the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation are in agreement about which accrediting authorities they will recognize. In a few cases, only one of them will list a particular accrediting authority. We accept a listing by either the U.S. Department of Education or the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, and only these two sources, as a basis for recognition in our publications. Although programs offered by establishments not listed by these two sources may be of satisfactory educational quality and meet the needs of some people, we have no basis for making such judgments. We especially want to avoid publicizing in any way the numerous diploma mills that exist. The Department of Education warns, "The liberal chartering laws in some States permit the existence of correspondence schools whose practices amount virtually to the sale

of diplomas or degrees. Such degrees have no academic value or recognition and may even discredit the professional and intellectual integrity of the holder." Diploma mills are more than willing to take your money--a lot of it! If you listed a "diploma" from one of them as an academic credential it could plague you for the rest of your life. Ironically, some people will spend their money on bogus credentials when they could get a perfectly legitimate external degree for far less! By considering only external degree programs from institutions listed by the United States Department of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, and by advising people to be aware of diploma mill traps, we believe we are significantly reducing risks for our readers, and greatly enhancing their chances for self-satisfaction and career gain.

TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS THAT OFFER EXTERNAL DEGREES

The types of institutions that offer external degrees are diverse. They vary, for example, by type of control, public or private. Some of the public institutions are state universities; others are community colleges. Most of the private institutions are nonprofit; some are profit-making. Several private colleges or universities are affiliated with religious bodies.

In terms of size, institutions with external degrees range from huge university systems with tens of thousands of students to small colleges with only a few hundred students. Several of the universities and some of the colleges are world-renowned; others, like the majority of our higher educational institutions, are well-known only in their regions. A few offer degrees no higher than associate; several offer both associate and bachelor's degrees; a few offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees; and a few offer only professional or graduate

degrees. A handful are correspondence schools exclusively; that is, they were established specifically as profit-making institutions to conduct only correspondence instruction.

TYPES OF EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMS

So far as structure is concerned there are basically two types of external degree programs, standard and individually-designed.

The standard, traditional types of on-campus programs have their counterparts in external programs. Either may be general in nature, with breadth of studies rather than depth being emphasized, or they may be focused, with the student being required to pursue a particular discipline in depth. The title of the degree may be general, such as Bachelor of Arts, or it may reflect the discipline, such as Bachelor of Business Administration, or Bachelor of Science in Nursing, or any one of many other specialized fields of study.

Individual design is more often found in external than in on-campus programs. An external program may be tailored to be similar to an on-campus curriculum, but not identical with it. The student and the advisor work out a program plan that best utilizes the resources of the institution and the resources that the student has at hand locally, and also meets both institutional quality standards and student needs.

FIELDS OF STUDY AVAILABLE IN EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMS

External programs, of course, do not offer as extensive a choice of fields of study as do the on-campus programs of some 3,000 institutions of

higher education in the United States. Yet, the fields are reasonably well-represented, especially in the business, liberal arts and sciences, and social sciences areas. Some opportunities also exist for study in allied health, engineering, and other technical areas.

Some fields of study traditionally require laboratory, studio, or group exercises that are difficult to complete externally--difficult, but usually not impossible. Sometimes laboratory requirements may be fully met by the student using local laboratory facilities: those at work, at a local college, or at some other local site such as a public school or a hospital. Sometimes the external degree institution can modify its requirements without sacrificing quality, and the student is allowed to substitute more theoretical study for some of the laboratory requirements.

Students that require studio experience in art, theater, or music areas might fulfill these requirements locally in a variety of ways such as by participating in community art, theater, or music groups. The external degree institution may appoint a qualified local person as an adjunct faculty member in order to give the student professional guidance.

The possibilities for adapting standard on-campus approaches to meet external circumstances are many, and will vary according to institutional policies, and the initiative, flexibility, and determination of both the external degree institution and the student. The Commission on Non-Traditional Study in 1973 advocated an institutional approach that "puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates more on the former's needs than the latter's convenience, (and) encourages diversity of individual opportunity." With a good attitude on the part of both the institution and student, many fields of study are possible externally.

THE GEOGRAPHICS OF EXTERNAL DEGREES

External degree programs fall into two categories geographically. One category serves the student regardless of where that person may live. This is possible for two reasons. First, regulations governing the institutions allow student enrollments regardless of the state or country of origin of the student. Second, the programs are designed so that the student has no residence requirement, or, if some residence is required, it can be accomplished in one, or a few, short, infrequent, intensive blocks of instruction on campus. Furthermore, this residence, if required at all, can be scheduled at times convenient to the student, such as one or two-week periods in the summer when the student could use vacation time to complete the degree.

The other category of external degree program serves the student in a more limited geographical area. This is due to one of two reasons, or both. First, regulations governing the institutions may restrict student enrollments to residents of the surrounding region--several states, perhaps, or one state only, or even to a section of a state. Second, program design may be a practical limitation not easily overcome. For example, several institutions that offer external degrees require the student to make two or more campus visits per semester for planning, coordination, instruction, or other reasons. Thus, although there may be no policy that limits enrollments geographically, only those persons who live within a reasonable distance can benefit from such programs.

LEVELS OF EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMS, AND OPTIONS

As we previously noted, external degrees from accredited institutions of higher education exist at undergraduate, professional, and graduate levels.

There are many more programs and fields of study available at the bachelor's level than at the others. The associate degree level is quite well represented. Several fine programs exist at the master's level. However, at this writing, to our knowledge only one program is available at the doctorate level. Some others are in candidacy status rather than fully-accredited. The directory published by the American Council on Education states, "Candidate for Accreditation is a status of affiliation with a recognized accrediting commission which indicates that an institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward, but does not assure, accreditation. . . . the institution must provide evidence of sound planning, the resources to implement these plans, and appear to have the potential for attaining its goals within a reasonable time." The situation may have changed by the time you read this, and more doctoral programs that have no, or minimal, residency requirements may have been fully accredited.

Since the number and variety of professional and graduate programs are more limited than undergraduate programs, a person seeking an advanced degree from an accredited institution might have to compromise and be even more flexible than would be the case at the lower levels. Fortunately, at the advanced degree levels, as well as at the undergraduate levels, several programs do offer degrees that allow significant flexibility in meeting the needs of the student. You might be able to get exactly the advanced degree and field of study you want, but if not, you might be able to meet many of your needs through careful coordination with your program advisor at the time you jointly design your degree approach.

Frankly, we believe that accredited institutions in the United States could, and should, be offering more external degrees, especially at the advanced levels. After all, a characteristic of advanced study at virtually all institutions is independent

scholarship.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOOSING YOUR FIELD OF STUDY

Many jobs require a degree in a specific field. If you aspire to one of these jobs, then obviously you will have to get an appropriate degree.

However, we have found that people frequently assume that an employer will require a specific degree when in fact that may not be the case. Especially at the associate and bachelor's levels, the employer may prefer a more general degree and rely on in-house training to provide the employee with the special job skills that are necessary. Or the employer may not care what field the employee selects for study. The employer may accept the award of a degree--any degree--as demonstration of capacity for conceptual learning of a high order, or simply as satisfaction of the minimum requirements in the job description for the employee's job.

If a graduate degree in a specialized field is your ultimate objective, or a requisite to gain entry to your chosen career, you might be surprised to discover that the pertinent graduate school might accept, or even prefer, a broadly-based undergraduate degree to one that was more focused. Long before you are ready to enroll in graduate school, you might do well to seek advice from career and graduate school counselors.

If you cannot find precisely the field of your choice in an external degree program, you should realize that some external degree programs which are general in nature or individually-designed may actually offer considerable opportunity for specializing. This may be true at both undergraduate and graduate levels. By proper selection of your elective areas and courses (or other sources of credit), in effect you might be able to design a program

that, although general in its overall structure and degree title, actually will fulfill many of your specialty needs.

The more flexible you can be in your choice of a field of study, the more options you will have in selecting a program. And allowing yourself the maximum number of options usually means assuring yourself of finding the highest possible quality program at the lowest cost, and receiving your degree in the least time.

THE RESIDENCY QUESTION

As we have stated, many external degree programs at the undergraduate levels require no residency. (In fact, several such programs have no campuses.) Several undergraduate programs, though, and most professional and graduate programs require some minimal residency.

The definition by the American Council on Education of an external degree program at the undergraduate levels includes the stipulation that "no more than 25 percent of the degree requirements be campus-located instruction." According to this definition, as much as one year of full-time residency could be required for a bachelor's program, yet the program would still be classified by this definition as "external."

We greatly respect ACE and its work, but in this case we believe that their definition is too liberal. Most working people would not be able to give up their jobs and travel to a campus for full-time residency for a year. On the other hand, we believe that it is inadvisable for a person who is not handicapped or otherwise confined to a specific location to exclude from consideration a certain external degree program because it may require one or more short periods on campus. When you consider

the low cost of the average external degree program as compared to the much higher cost of a comparable traditional program (to include, importantly, the time saved in earning the external degree), the cost of travel and room and board for brief periods of residency is a relatively small price to pay to gain your degree. Many external students in fact look upon these short residencies, if required in their particular program, with anticipation. They will have an opportunity, even though brief, to get to know much better their alma mater and some of its people--administrators, faculty, fellow students. Here is an opportunity to participate at least a little in campus life. Here is an opportunity for the rest of the family, perhaps, to have a vacation while the degree earner is learning.

If a program otherwise meets most of your needs, you would be wise not to discount it just because it may require minimal residency. In most cases, to do so would be to restrict your options unnecessarily. Remember, the degree you earn will be yours for the rest of your life.

THE MUCH LOWER COST OF EXTERNAL DEGREES

Why does the average external degree cost far less than a comparable traditional degree?

We have already mentioned some reasons. Now let's consider other factors, first from an institutional point of view.

The external degree student utilizes far less of an institution's resources than does the full-time resident student. For example, no (or minimal) dormitories, cafeterias, classrooms, or laboratories are required to serve the external student. The gymnasium, the student union, the plant maintenance garage--none of these structures and many others normally found on a campus are required to support

an external program. In fact, some external degree institutions have no campus.

An external degree program also can be economical in use of personnel. By reassignment of responsibilities, faculty and staff already at an institution may be used to service an external program; thus, additional personnel costs are avoided. With little extra expenditure, an institution often may more fully utilize the resources it already possesses to generate more income and provide an important service to students.

Alternative sources of credits can also equate to savings. Awarding credits for correspondence courses, proficiency examinations, military service, noncollegiate courses, cooperative education, apprenticeships, internships, and experiential learning often is less expensive for an institution than awarding residence credits.

Sometimes, depending on an institution's particular circumstances, savings as a result of the above factors can be passed on to the external student in the form of lower tuition.

Now, from the student's viewpoint, consider these reasons:

Not only is tuition much lower for some external degrees, but you avoid large residence costs for room and board, as well as costs for commuting, baby-sitting, and eating in college snack bars. Such costs are frequently incurred during traditional college attendance, some of them even during part-time enrollment. Also, your costs for taking correspondence work and proficiency examinations, or for getting your prior learning assessed for credit are usually far less per credit than costs for the same amount of on-campus credit. They even may be less than the costs for credit from an inexpensive local public institution.

Let us emphasize one point: tuition and these related costs, though important factors, are not the largest expense in getting a degree. It is the time taken to get the degree--time that could be invested in employment, earning while learning.

Consider this: If a person could be employed during the years that would be spent in getting a traditional degree through full-time, on-campus attendance, and that person could pay for an external degree largely out of current earnings instead of loans, the large dollar differential could mean a far brighter financial future. That person, instead of being out of the job market, incurring college debts, and losing not just earnings but experience and promotion potential would be gaining both a degree and independent work and study skills that are highly in demand among employers.

And consider this: If a person could get a degree within a year or a few years instead of taking up to 15-20 years while grinding away part-time in a traditional program, what a difference that could make in earnings potential (and self-satisfaction).

These have been some of the reasons why an external degree may cost only a few hundred or a few thousand dollars instead of the tens of thousands of many traditional programs. Considering both direct and indirect costs (especially the potential costs of lost opportunities during a long traditional route to a degree), an external degree program, even if it requires some minimal residence, may be a real bargain as compared to a traditional program.

SOME REASONS FOR CHOOSING AN EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAM

As many reasons exist as there are people since the external degree, by its nature, most often can accommodate an individual's specific circumstances.

We have stated or implied most of the common reasons. In summary: 1) Convenience. College comes to you, or, if some residence is required, you go to it for intensive blocks of instruction that fit into your work and home schedules. Also, you can usually work at the degree as your time allows. The degree program, then, is essentially in your own place, at your own pace. 2) Degree options. If your local college doesn't offer the degree field or degree level you desire, you may be able to get what you want through an external program. 3) Prestige. You may prefer the degree of another institution to that of your local college. 4) Quick access to a degree. Since external degree programs tend to award the maximum amount of credit possible for previous and current learning gained in nontraditional ways, your degree may be much closer than you realize. Instead of a part-time student spending up to 15-20 years in getting a bachelor's degree through attending classes, that same student might complete a comparable degree externally in one to four years. 5) Lower cost. As we have seen, direct college costs may be lower, and the time saved in getting the degree may be even more important. Often, external degrees may be gained for one-fourth to even one-tenth of the cost of comparable on-campus degrees.

SOME REASONS FOR NOT CHOOSING AN EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAM

Again, there are many reasons why an external degree program might not be as appropriate as a traditional one for an individual. Fields of study in external programs are quite numerous, and a variety of public and private institutions offer these programs, yet the available options are not nearly as plentiful as those in traditional higher education for people who have the educational qualifications, financial means, and personal circumstances that allow them great lattitude in their choices. The external

degree approach is definitely not for everyone. It is usually best suited to the person who can work independently; who is strongly motivated (an important exception is noted later); who will patiently document work and life experience for credit; who will take the time to survey the many correspondence courses and proficiency examinations, and will complete appropr'ate ones for credit; and who will establish study routines and adhere to them to complete remaining degree requirements.

EXTERNAL DEGREES ARE FOR ADULTS, AGE 25 AND OLDER

Most external degree programs were designed for adults who, because of job, family, financial, or other circumstances, were cut off from ever attaining their first, or higher level, college degree. Many programs do not even accept younger students, or, if they do, are really not very well suited for them. If you are an adult, age 25 or older, you may be already qualified for the award of an associate degree (equivalent to two years of full-time study on campus), or close to a bachelor's degree (four years on campus), and not even know it! Or you may be able to get a graduate degree in less time than you imagined possible. College personnel who administer external degree programs have your unique needs and problems in mind, and they want to assist you to get maximum credit for what you already know, have done, or can do outside the conventional classroom.

AND EXTERNAL DEGREES ARE FOR YOUNGER PEOPLE, TOO

If you are younger than age 25, you may still be able to get an external degree that will meet your needs. Several programs have no minimum age restrictions and are well-suited to the younger student. Of course, you will not receive as large an

award for prior learning as will the average older person, but you will be able to take proficiency exams, correspondence courses, and qualify for credit for cooperative education, apprenticeships, or internships, just like the older student. Importantly, you will be able to learn as you earn, in your own home town, on your own farm, or anywhere else you choose to go to work.

An external degree program might suit you as a complete degree program or as a temporary substitute for an on-campus experience. In the external program you can gain college credits while you work and save. Later, when you can afford it, or when your personal circumstances allow, you may transfer many or all of those credits to a traditional institution for your degree completion. Because of a bleak financial aid picture, we believe that many recent high school graduates are going to find external degrees to be their temporary or permanent solution to the high cost of higher education.

Whereas most adults will choose an external degree program because they know they want that college degree and are highly motivated to get it, some people, especially youths, often are unsure of their goals and want to "try out" college, at home, inexpensively, before they commit themselves. As time passes, they choose a career and a college degree program to fit it. But in the meantime they are not just wasting time. They are gaining college credits they can later use, as well as invaluable work experiences. So, although most external degree programs are for adults, age 25 and older, some may well fit the needs of younger students, too.

THE INCREASING NEED FOR EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMS

Most institutions now accept some nontraditional means for students to gain college credits. (In fact, the use of the term "nontraditional" is

becoming suspect since supposedly "nontraditional" methods have become so widespread.) However, institutions that offer complete degree programs, especially those that are accessible to anyone anywhere, are still very much in the minority.

We expect that situation to change significantly in the years ahead. In a tight job market, academic credentials are especially important for maintaining competitiveness in the current job, or for competing for another job. Yet, with sufficient financial resources so difficult to attain for so many people, getting a traditional, campus-based degree with its much higher cost in dollars and time will become more of a dilemma. Because the external degree costs much less and is achieved sooner, on average, than the traditional degree, we believe that more and more students of all ages will be attracted to this route. Also, from an institutional point of view, the external degree makes good sense during periods of economic stress. It can be an important means of attracting students that would otherwise be lost to the institution. The challenge for higher education is going to be to develop more programs of high quality at all levels that are truly accessible to qualified people everywhere.

YOU AND YOUR EXTERNAL DEGREE

No, an external degree program is not for everyone. But yes, it could be just right for you. It could allow you to get the degree at the level you want, at much less cost, in much less time. It could be a source of great self-satisfaction, an indispensable career credential, and a door-opener to ever-increasing opportunities as you proceed along your path of lifelong learning.

"The Unexamined Life is Not Worth Living"
(Socrates)

Is a College Degree
In Your Future?

Photo of Richard C. Wagner, Courtesy of
Dale Reich
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

A SAMPLING OF DEGREE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE THROUGH EXTERNAL PROGRAMS

1. This world-famous, mid-western, private university offers associate degrees in English, geneology, home and family development, justice administration, and independent studies; and a bachelor's degree in independent studies. Residency requirements range from no residency to a few days to a few weeks, depending on the program. All programs are inexpensive, with tuition averaging around $2000 for an associate degree and around $3000 for a bachelor's degree. The average completion time for an associate degree is 2-3 years.

2. A private college of engineering on the west coast, this correspondence school conducts instruction exclusively by home study. It awards both the associate and bachelor of science degrees in engineering technology. The latter costs around $5000 and takes, on average, six years to complete.

3. A part of a great university system in a northeastern state, this institution offers the associate in arts, associate in science, associate in science (nursing), associate in applied science (nursing), bachelor of science (nursing), bachelor of arts, bachelor of science, and bachelor of science (business) degrees. It requires no residency, and many of its tens of thousands of graduates have completed a bachelor's program in less than two years at costs of only a few hundred to less than two thousand dollars.

4. This large state university in the southwest offers both the bachelor of liberal studies and master of liberal studies degrees. The latter can be taken with a museum studies emphasis, or it can be general, or it can be tailored to reflect the student's unique needs. The M.L.S. requires one 1-week seminar and two 3-week seminars, and most students complete the program in two years. Because of low out-of-state tuition, this master's degree

can cost under $5000 to include tuition, air fare from anywhere in the United States, and room and board for the seminars.

Note: Costs are subject to increase due to inflation or other factors.

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PROGRAM DETAILS, THOMAS A. EDISON STATE COLLEGE

Among more than forty colleges and universities that offer external degrees which are accessible to distant, as well as local, students, Edison is one of the leaders. The college provides diversity of fields of study and good service to students at reasonable costs. ETC Associates, a creator and distributor of lifelong learning publications, and a counseling service, maintains a continuously updated data base on Edison and all institutions that have reported easily accessible external degree programs to us. Our format is the same as the one used here for the Edison program. We solicit input from students as well as program administrators. If you enroll at Edison or any other external degree institution, please share your experiences with us. By providing input for our publications and consulting services, you will be assisting those who come behind you to make better educational and career choices.

THOMAS A. EDISON STATE COLLEGE
The Kelsey Building
101 West State Street
CN545
Trenton, NJ 08625

Institutional accreditation: Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools

Highest offering: Baccalaureate

Established: 1972 Enrollment: 3,601

Control or affiliation: State/Local

EXTERNAL DEGREE DATA

1. Degree(s): Associate in Arts (A.A.); Associate in Science in Management (A.S.M.); Associate in Applied Science in Radiologic Technology (A.A.S.R.T.); Bachelor of Arts (B.A.); Bachelor of Science (B.S.); Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (B.S.B.A.); For Bachelor of Science in Nursing (B.S.N.) see item 28.

2. Major(s): As in 1 above; also, transcripts reflect concentrations, specializations, and options.

3. Concentration(s): For A.A. and A.A.S.R.T.: None. For A.S.M.: Options in Accounting, Administrative Office Management, Data Processing, Finance, General Management, Management of Human Resources, Marketing, Operations Management, Real Estate. For B.A.: Concentrations in Humanities, Social Science/History, Natural Science/Mathematics. Approved Specializations in Art, Buddhist Studies, Biology, Chemistry, Church Music, Communications, Computer Science, English, Environmental Sciences, Hebraic Studies, History, Human Communication, Italian

Language, Judaic Studies, Music, Photojournalism, Psychology, Sociology, Spanish Language, Studio Art, Theater Arts. For B.S. (Human Services Option): Specializations in Art Therapy, Community Education Services, Community Legal Services, Community Services, Counseling Services, Criminal Justice, Gerontology, Health Services, Health Services Administration, Health Services Education, Mental Health Services, Mental Retardation Services, Public Administration, Public Safety Services, Recreation Services, Rehabilitation Services (not intended for certification), Services for the Deaf, Social Services, Social Services Administration. For B.S. (Applied Science and Technology Option): Specializations in Air Traffic Control, Architectural Design Services, Audiology, Aviation, Biological Laboratory Services, Biomedical Electronics, Chemical Laboratory Services, Computer Services, Construction, Dental Hygienics, Electronics, Environmental Services, Fire Protection, Fire Science, Horticulture, Laboratory Animal Services, Medical Laboratory Services, Naval Science, Nuclear Industrial Operations, Radiation Protection, Radiologic Services, Respiratory Services, Services in Civil Technology, Surveying, Technical Services in Food Science, Technical Services in Industry, Technical Services in Nuclear Medicine, Water Resources Management. For B.S.B.A.: Standard Specializations in Accounting, Finance, Management of Human Resources, Marketing, Operations Management; Non-Standard Specializations in Administrative Office Management, Data Processing, Data Processing/Management of Human Resources, Finance/Accounting, Finance/Marketing, Hospital Administration--Finance and Accounting, Hospital and Health Care Administration, Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Management, Insurance, Operations Management/Management of Human Resources, Public Administration, Real Estate, School Business Administration, Transportation Management. Additional specializations may be developed depending on individual students' backgrounds and interests. Check with the college.

4. Credit for standard achievement tests: Yes

5. Credit for experiential learning (portfolio or other assesment): Yes

6. Average credit for prior learning (other than prior college courses): Data not available; however, most students have substantial credit awarded to them as a result of their prior learning.

7. Credit hours required for degree(s): For associate: 60 semester hours; for baccalaureate: 120 semester hours

8. Minimum credit hours/time required in institution's external degree program: None

9. Minimum required residency (on-campus attendance): None

10. (If residency is required) Student can complete program entirely through summer residency: Not applicable

11. Year program(s) began: 1972

12. Number of degrees conferred: A.A.: 1,978; A.S.M.: 101; A.A.S.R.T.: 17; B.A.: 1,064; B.S.: 176; B.S.B.A.: 210

13. Number of students currently enrolled: A.A.: 528; A.S.M.: 134; A.A.S.R.T.: 22; B.A.: 874; B.S.: 777; B.S.B.A.: 669. Additionally, 597 students are using credit banking services for evaluation and documentation of credentials. See item 28.

14. Average time for degree completion: Estimated 1 and 1/2 years for associate degrees and 3 years for baccalaureate. Many students require little or no additional work and are able to graduate soon after entry.

15. Minimum age for admission: None

16. Other admission requirements: None (open admission)

17. Percentage of students under age 24 upon enrollment: 10.2%

18. Out-of-state students: Accepted

19. Percentage out-of-state students: 30%

20. Ease of completion for out-of-state students: No difference from in-state

21. Foreign students accepted? Not individually accepted while resident in foreign lands. However, some groups are accepted if the sponsoring institution makes arrangements with Edison. Also, individual foreign students who are in the U.S. on an extended basis may be accepted.

22. Special requirements for foreign students: None

23. Program costs: Figures are for 1982-83 and are subject to increase. Figures in parentheses are out-of-state costs. Enrollment and first-year tuition equivalency fee: $145 (200). Tuition equivalency payable each subsequent year: $110 (165). Graduation fee for associate degree: $50 (50); for baccalaureate degree: $75 (75). Pre-graduation conference for B.A. degree: $50 (75). Practicum application for B.S. (Human Services Option): $75 (125); per credit attempted: $14 (21). Demonstration of currency application (professional and business degrees): $75 (125). Portfolio development and assessment, workshop: $25 (25); application: $75 (125); assessment per credit attempted: $14 (21). Edison State College Examination Program (TECEP) per credit attempted: $14 (21). Credit banking/evaluation for limited service students: $40 (60).

24. Average cost for degree completion: For associate: $1100; for baccalaureate: $2100

25. Second-degree candidates accepted: Yes

26. Minimum credit hours required in program for second-degree candidates: 30 semester hours plus any hours necessary to meet requirements for the degree being sought.

27. Diploma specifies that degree was obtained by external means: No

28. Other data: Edison conducts no instruction and has no faculty. It administers its own proficiency examination program (TECEP). Students may use the college as a "credit bank" by having all of their credits earned through equivalency exams, individual assessment, or previous college work entered on an Edison transcript and then transferring them to another institution. B.A. candidates only must have a pre-graduation conference (waivers granted under certain conditions). The A.S. in Management articulates with the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. A.A.S.R.T. applicants must be certified by either the New Jersey Licensing Board (General X-Ray Technology) or the National Registry (A.A.R.T.). As of press time, the B.S.N. program had been approved but not opened for enrollment. Check with the college for details.

29. Applicants contact: Nancy Norville, Coordinator of Admissions 609 984 1150

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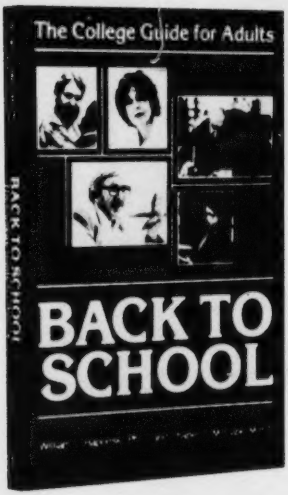

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